THE IMPORT OFPROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper discussed the import of professional development programmes for primary school teachers in Nigeria. It highlighted the relevance of the primary school teacher; effective development programmes for them in relation to their teaching competences; the primary education in Nigeria, its functions and challenges confronting it; challenges facing primary school teachers. The paper further explored the objectives and forms of teachers' development and barriers to effective teacher development programmes in Nigeria. It concluded that Mechanisms for effective teachers' professional development should be put in place by stakeholders on a regular basis; as this is tantamount to enhancing teachers' teaching competences and that teachers at the primary schools need regular on-the-job professional development programmes. A number of recommendations were articulated to ensure continuous and effective teachers development for practicing primary school teachers in Nigeria.

Keywords: Teachers' Professional Development Programmes; Primary School Teachers; Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The teacher is the human functional face that engineers the educational advancement and development of societies, as they provide and direct the education systems by fostering and sustaining knowledge, skills and experience acquisition. The teacher has a huge role to play at ensuring that learning at any level is achieved systematically and practically. The continued existence and progress of the teaching profession is a function of the teacher. For the teacher to optimally perform in his or her duties, he/she should on a continous basis be updated in knowledge, experiences and teaching skills as these will go a long way at improving their competences. It is imperative that mechanism for achieving this be put in place by concerned education stakeholders. These mechanisms are germane at ensuring the professional development of teachers. The association for teacher education in Europe (2006) Posits that teaching is 'a profession that requires continuing professional development, reflective thinking, responsibility, autonomy, creativity, research and personal judgments. Obanya (2004) noted that the era where all that was required of a teacher was subject matter knowledge is far gone. There is utmost need for improved teacher education which is more than a necessity in the 21st century where technological development and advancement has become a main stay.

Teachers' significance as posited by the federal government of Nigeria (2013) in her national policy on education, states that "no educational system may rise above the quality of its teachers." This is in tandem with the National Policy on Education which stated that the purpose of teacher education is to produce highly motivated, conscientious and effective classroom teachers while boosting the spirit of creativity and enquiry and assisting them to adapt the current societal ways of life; making available teachers with sound professional and intellectual background which will be applicable in their daily teaching obligations and ensuring their adaptability in an ever changing society and the world at large and to enhance their commitment to the teaching profession. Kolo (2009) holds the view that teachers fundamentally need a continued and lifelong learning as to be able to shoulder their duties in and outside the classroom and be capable of positively inducing pupils' behaviours, way of life and the way the think. Similarly, Jokthan (2012) suggests: Teachers are expected to be prospectors, inspirers, critics and appreciators of excellence and enemies of shoddiness. Various research findings (Ibukun, 1983, cited in Ibukun, 2009) and reports (Ojo, 2006; Achimugu, 2005 and Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) have nonetheless supported the irreplaceable role of teachers in the educational system of any country. It is upon their number, devotion, commitment to duty and quality that the feat and development of the education sector lies upon.

Teacher Professional development programmes can be regarded as the on-the job training for teachers that is aimed at improving and enhancing teachers' competency skills. It is the provision of avenues for the continuous updating of teachers competency, effectiveness and efficiency in skills and knowledge, a lifelong learning process which results from a meaningful interaction between these teachers and the professional environment. It entails activities designed at developing the skills, expertise, knowledge and other characteristics of a practicing teacher (Ceano, 2011; Ingersoil & Kralik, 2004; Ikediuqwu, 2001). Further, Goodall, Day, Lingsay, Muiji & Harris (2005)

noted that teacher professional development programs are learning experiences and activities which are intended to immensely benefit the populace at large both directly and indirectly; as well as aiding teachers' competencies. It is the organized and controlled professional learning that results into the overall improvements in teachers' teaching practices and pupils outcomes in learning.

More so, professional development for teachers is a well planned activity designed at refining and enhancing teachers' skills, concept, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour to empower them meet the demands of the teaching job (Akpan, 1999). It centers on improving the skills of teachers (both conceptually and intellectually) and their capacities for higher job outputs. In the same vein, Alabi (2002) also reaffirmed that teachers' development programmes are linked with the overall development of teachers in terms of perception, behaviour, skills, attitudes, knowledge and in the performance of their responsibilities; enhancing the teaching-learning processes, teacher competence during classroom interaction. Teachers, as a key constituent of education, are confronted with various challenges, difficulties and changes; requiring that they equip themselves with current knowledge and skills as to augment their competence in teaching (Kabadayi, 2016).

Teachers' competence which can be facilitated by professional development is the ability of teachers in coping with specific school learning activities. It can be defined more so, as the complex combinations of knowledge, values and attitudes leading to effective action in classroom situations (European Commission, 2012).Competencies of teachers is a buildup of experiences aimed at facilitating learning (Carreker & Boulware, 2015); it is a multi-dimensional construct that entails competence in professionalism and pedagogy (Baumert & Kunter, 2006).The various forms of teachers' competence may include: subject-didactic competence, self-reflection competence, organizational competence, motivational competence, cognitive competence, metacognitive competence, and emotional / social competence (Redding, 2014, Hospesová & Tichá, 2000).These competences do foster teachers' confidence in their teaching methodologies and lesson delivery strategies as well as pupils ratings of how good their teacher is and his ability to provide good learning situation (Skolverket, 2006).

Research has recognized the import of teachers' professional development as crucial to changing classroom practices, improving schools and bettering pupils' learning outcomes (Borko, 2004). Professional learning often takes place in formal settings such as professional development programmes, teaching research groups and formal mentoring programmes (Timperley, 2011). Teachers also can learn through informal interactions that occur during collaborative planning, peer teaching and mentoring between colleagues (Little, 2012). Moreover, evidence that professional development is paramount when entrenched in the teachers' specific subject areas abound (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009). Simmons (2010) also noted that classroom management and the basic understanding of educational theory is essential for teachers teaching in the 21st century. These teachers also need to collaborate with other teachers as to learn how to implement innovative teaching skills and technology in the classroom, and how to prepare pupils to fit into the global economy.

Oladunjoye (2014) as cited in Akpan & Ita (2015), was of the view that induction programmes for teachers is aimed at providing them with qualitative education and the necessary skills for overcoming the various challenges confronting the education sector; teachers' professional development is fundamental to the development of education and in raising teachers' education standard in order to supplement the teaching profession, thereby causing pupils enhanced performance in examinations. Similarly, some studies have reported the impact of teachers' development programmes on the attitude of teachers to work, effectiveness and their productivity around the world (Akpan, 1999; Jeffrey, 2014). Also, Ekpela (2005) acknowledged that the causes of poor quality output of teachers include: inability to attending workshops, seminars and conferences, unpreparedness in terms of skills update. He upheld that teachers should be motivated towards attending professional development programmes as to enhance teacher quality outputs. Therefore, making available opportunities for teachers' intensive and continuous professional development programme at all levels of education (primary school teachers, most especially) will enhance quality teaching and learning.

Effective professional development as defined by the Oranisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2005) is an on-going process that comprises training, practice and feedback, and offers sufficient time and follow-up support. The features of effective professional development include: integrates active learning; utilises adult learning theory; it is content focused; uses models and modeling of effective practice; supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts; offers opportunities for feedback and reflection; provides coaching and expert support and is of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017). Effective professional development affords teachers with ample time to learn, implement, practice and reflect upon current approaches that facilitates and better their practice.

Teacher educators-those contracted to train these teachers, do need a similar (or a greater) skills as the teachers they are to train. These skills may include: diverse models of instructional strategies and assessment

practices; deep content knowledge; learning and development of children and adults; the aptitude to model effective instructional and assessment practices; clinical and supervision skills; support teachers and hold planned or informal meetings with teachers; the aptitude and disposition to coach and the ability to support teachers through observations, feedback, modeling, workshops, coaching, and/or planned/informal meetings (Cordingley, Bell, Isham, Evans & Firth, 2007).

2. The Primary Education in Nigeria

The primary education, globally, is the basis of formal education. It is the thread that connects other higher levels of learning, developing in young minds the very skills, experiences and knowledge for a tougher and higher pursuit in academics. Through primary education, the art and act of writing, reading, acquisition of necessary skills, attitudes and the basic information needed for appropriate adjustment into the society and the world in general is imbibed. This level of education is paramount to the core advancement of many economies, a reason for its inclusion into the Millennium Development Goals of the universal primary education. Various problems ranging from insecurity, illiteracy, religious violence, ignorance and political servitude in Nigeria for example, can be curbed or eradicated by the aid of primary education. This has caused most governments (Nigeria included) to make primary education free and declare it universal and compulsory (Kubiat, 2018).

3. Functions/Importance of Primary Education in Nigeria

The functions/importance of primary education across Nigeria is:
1. To help learners master the art of writing, reading and Arithmetic.
2. To help learners develop and be of good conduct and behavior.
3. To help learners in acquiring vital skills and appreciate the worth of manual labour.

An indispensable purpose of primary education is to effectively communicate skills that will assist pupils to be pertinent to the social and economic development of their nations. Hence, primary educations aim at giving rise to a literate population and prepare the footing for the secondary and higher education.

4. Challenges of Primary Education in Nigeria

1. Inadequate Funding

Financial resources (funding) are needed to effectively and efficiently run all levels of education, especial the primary education act as a lubricant for the system and without these financial resources programs cannot be properly planned nor policies implemented. Therefore, in the absence of adequate funds and proper management, any plans of transformation are bound to fail. Funding issues in primary education plays a crucial role in determining the level of success, development and change. Adequate funding entails a timely supply of funds, qualified teachers, administrators and infrastructural facilities to ensure success in any organization. Primary education is a social service that requires adequate financial provision from all tiers of Government for proper execution of educational programs, schemes and policies. This inadequacy in funding may have been caused by financial problems in terms of misappropriation and embezzlement of funds, and financial crimes of all sorts being perpetuated by those in authority.

2. Teaching Personnel Issues

Various challenges such as poor teaching and learning conditions, overcrowded classrooms and lack of teaching and learning materials hampers the smooth running and development of primary schools. There is the need for teachers at this level to have both pedagogical and administrative skills which they will require in solving daily classroom problems and challenges.

3. Issues with curriculum

The value of the curriculum cannot be overemphasized. The teaching and learning transactions under a school is piloted by the curriculum as it ensures that teachers and learners meet the needs of the society in more ways than one. Also, the problem of frequent curriculum change or adjustments, negatively affects the outputs of this level of education. The inclusion of more or new subjects into the already overloaded curriculum does worsen the situation on ground. This makes the Nigeria primary school curriculum to appear unstable, bogus and unrealistic.

4. Poor Infrastructural Facilities

Physical facilities/infrastructure in and outside the classroom positively impact on teaching and learning especially among the primary school pupils whose sense of imagination is still premature. The accessibility and

usability of classrooms, school building, chairs and other teaching and learning facilities are indispensable to the realization of the purposes of the primary educational system. However, in the Nigerian situation, infrastructural development in the primary schools is not commensurate with pupils' enrolment rate. The teaching and learning conditions in most primary schools across Nigeria are unacceptable and unbearable as a result of dearth of infrastructure and facilities for teaching and learning.

5. Challenges Facing Primary School Teachers in Nigeria

1. Incorporating the 21st century learning skills into the curriculum Content: Many schools especially the primary schools are yet to make the shift to the new millennium's styles of teaching and learning irrespective of the 21st century clamor. An overloaded and overstretched curriculum can hamper teachers' efficiency and effectiveness in teaching as they become overwhelmed in the discharge of their professional responsibilities.

2. Slow, poor development and growth in information communications technology (ICT): The pupils' in todays' classrooms are more ICT compliant than the teacher with respect to social media apps, electronic games and multimedia entertainment. This is because the teachers are not in tune with the current ICT knowledge and applications.

3. Absence of peer collaboration: The teaching professions in line with its nature and culture, requires that teachers, irrespective of the level they teach need to immensely collaborate with fellow teachers/peers. The high teachers' workload has turned teacher's job to be one of isolation, with many teachers struggling to find time in writing their lesson plan and lesson note; preventing these teachers from engaging with colleagues in pedagogical professional conversations.

4. Inability at identifying or creating effective ideas: The internet is full of various useful ideas the teacher and even the pupils' need to grasp for a betterment in the performances. But the teachers/pupils do have challenges in identifying which of these ideas are effective at solving or meeting a teaching-learning need at one point or the other.

5. Curriculum overload: Governments at one point in time or the other had continuously injected new subjects and programmes into the primary curriculum, thereby, overworking and overlabouring the teachers on ground.

6. Pupils lack of learning resources: It is natural that pupils in classrooms are different in every sense of the word. Each and every one of them operating at different mental, psychological and emotional levels and threshold, and specific special educational needs. These pupils', as a result of their home background and socioeconomic status cannot afford or access the essential learning materials. This affects both the teacher and the pupils themselves; especially, in terms of their learning outcomes.

7. Timelessness: Overtime, teachers at all levels, do complain that they do not have time for personal development, planning and research because they spend most of their time in the school/classroom or in school related activities.

Other challenges may include: Inadequate funding from governments; lack of qualified teachers; Distraction on the part of the teachers; Poorly motivated individuals not suited for the job; Poor school, teaching and learning infrastructure; Poor teachers' remuneration; Delay in promotion; Delay in payment of salaries, fringe benefits and gratuities and Overcrowded classrooms.

6. The Objectives of Primary School Teachers Development

The development of teachers beyond their initial training (trainings obtained from colleges of education and universities) can serve a number of objectives, including:

1. To update individuals' skills, attitudes and approaches in light of the development of new teaching techniques and objectives, new circumstances and new educational research;
2. To update individuals' knowledge of a subject in light of recent advances in the area;
3. To help weaker teachers become more effective.
4. To exchange information and expertise among teachers and others, e.g. academics, industrialists;
5. To enable schools to develop and apply new strategies concerning the curriculum and other aspects of teaching

practice; and

6. To enable individuals to apply changes made to curricula or other aspects of teaching practice;

7. Importance of Teachers' Development for Primary School Teachers

The importance of teacher development especially for primary school teachers are:

1. It enhances teachers' competence in carrying out their job effectively through knowledge and skills acquisition;

2. Reform teachers' behaviour through learning experiences;

3. Provides teachers' with knowledge on how to perform current jobs;

4. Updating teachers' knowledge to cope with educational reforms and curriculum changes;

5. Increases teachers' confidence, motivation and commitment;

6. Enhancing teachers' responsibility;

7. Ensures satisfaction of staff;

8. Improves the quality of teaching staff, which inadvertently improves the quality of the non-teaching staff; and

9. Keeping up-to-date with ICT/Technologies at large.

8. Forms of Professional Development Programmes Available to Primary School Teachers

1. Workshops/ courses (e.g. on subject matter or methods and/or other education-related topics);

2. Educational Seminars/conferences (at which teachers and/or researchers present their research results and discuss education problems);

3. Qualification programmes (e.g. degree, PGDE programmes etc.);

4. Teachers observation visits to other schools;

5. Participation in a network of teachers formed specifically for the purpose of professional development;

6. Individual or cooperative research on a topic of professional interest; and

7. Mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching, as part of a formal school arrangement.

9. Barriers to effective teachers' Professional Development

The quality of an effective professional development programme for teachers; especially at the primary school level, requires high level of initiatives and implementation which will in the long run has implications for the overall effectiveness of such programmes. Many a time, there are barriers that impede or serve a barrier to the effective implementation of these programmes. These barriers include:

1. Inadequate necessary curriculum resources/materials;

2. Lack of technical know-how on what high-quality instruction entails;

3. Short time allocated to teaching a particular subject as the teacher is restricted and unable to implement new instructional approaches within the allotted time;

4. Failure to align with state and local policies toward a coherent set of instructional practices;

5. Negative school cultures; and

6. Inability to track and assess the quality of professional development;

7. Poor or lack of funding for teachers professional development;

8. Facilitators or tutors who are to train these teachers are selected or contracted on the basis of tribalism, ethnicity, religion, nepotism and political affiliations; not on merit or qualification; and

9. Lack or inadequate teachers' evaluation and monitoring officers.

10. Lack of information and communication technology, and e-learning platforms.

Executing professional development successfully will also requires responsiveness to the specific needs of teachers and learners, and to the school and the contexts in which teaching and learning will take place. These obstacles to teachers' professional development should be anticipated and planned for during both the design and implementation phases of professional development. In the Nigerian situation, many states have conducted professional development and training programmes for teachers at one time or the other, especially under the UBEC/SUBEB teacher development partnership programmes. These programmes have been made flexible enough for teachers attendance and participation as the teachers' primary teaching assignment in their various schools were not affected, given that the workshops are organized on fortnight basis (especially on Fridays) for a period of 14-16 weeks and the classes/training sections is most interactive. The teachers are encouraged by the government to ensure they attend and fully participate by providing breakfast and lunch for them, and are paid some money for their transport logistics. These had yielded positive results. The import of these development programmes

according to Etuk (2001); Afolabi, Olorisade and Oguntunde (2012) recounts a significant relationship between in-service training of teachers and quality universal basic education and therefore, emphasized the need for in-service development and training programmes for both new and old teachers for the enhancement of quality universal basic education in Nigeria.

More so, teachers' participation in conferences, seminars and workshops as components of teacher development programme has been found to correlate positively with teacher output. Locke (2004) in his study reported that teachers' regular attendance in conferences, seminars and workshops resulted in improvement of skills and hence quality output. Thus, the more teachers participated in seminars and workshops, the better the quality of output in terms of academic achievement. Walton (2005) studied the influence of workshops on teachers' job performance and reported a significant influence of workshops on teachers' output. The researcher concluded that teachers should be provided with opportunities to attend workshops to acquire and update their skills for high productivity.

Suggestions

Based on the discussions above, the following recommendations are hereby suggested:

I. The Nigerian teachers who are practicing especially at the primary schools, should be encouraged to attend professional development programmes for capacity building and growth at least twice a year; this can be achieved easily when governments seriously commit to teachers' professional development and providing incentives (monetarily or otherwise) for teachers who attend.

II. Vivid policy statement, backed by political will, should be enacted to ensure that every primary school practicing teacher undergoes a minimum of two professional development programmes in an academic session as part of their promotion assessment criteria.

III. Government should recruit more teachers with M.Ed minimum teaching qualification, as they could serve as trainers and mentors for teachers at the school levels.

IV. Inspectors from the Ministry of Education should frequently visit, monitor and appraise primary school teachers in order to know those who should be trained or retrained.

Conclusion

The place and role of the teacher cannot be undermined, as he has a huge role to play at ensuring that learning at any level is achieved systematically and practically. The survival and progress of the teaching profession is a function of the teacher. Mechanisms for effective professional development of teachers should be put in place by stakeholders on a regular basis as this is tantamount to enhancing teachers' teaching competences. It is upon their number, their quality, devotion and commitment to duty that depend the success and progress of any educational system. Teacher Professional development programmes avenues for the continuous updating of teachers competency, effectiveness and efficiency in skills and knowledge, a lifelong learning process which results from a meaningful interaction between these teachers and the professional environment. Creating opportunities for a focused and sustained professional development programme for primary school teachers will ultimately enhance quality teaching and learning.

Effective professional development provides teachers with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice. In view of various challenges teachers face in their everyday classroom-school interactions, they must be exposed the current and better ways of overcoming such challenges. Primary school teachers in Nigeria are experiencing an unprecedented transition in their role and status and demands on them are becoming increasingly multi-faceted. These teachers do not have the training or experience to cope with this changing role. Therefore, Teachers at the primary education levels needs regular on-the-job professional development programmes as it lays the academic and moral foundation for creating better opportunities for young people, ensuring that they have necessary reading and writing skills that they will need in the society. Lawal, Maduekwe, Ikonta & Adeosun, (2010) reaffirmed these ideas by stating that "the educational system will not be modernized until the whole system is drastically overhauled, stimulated by pedagogical research, made intellectually richer, more challenging and extended beyond pre-service training into a system of continuous professional renewal and career development for all teachers".

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